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SUBJECT: BASRAH GOVERNOR CONTINUES TO MAKE NOISE WHILE BRITISH QUIETLY GATHER SUPPORT FOR THEIR ARRESTS OF IRAQI POLICE SERVICE MEMBERS

REF: BASRAH 00010

CLASSIFIED BY: Mark Marrano, Deputy Regional Coordinator, Basrah Regional Embassy Office, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC) met with the British Consul General (CG) on January 27 to discuss the current political situation in Basrah (see reftel.) The British CG provided a read out on his attempts yesterday to engage tribal leaders and an assessment of the Governor's political survival. The DRC and the CG also agreed on the best course of action with regards to Provincial Council's letter to the DRC asking for mediation. End Summary.

¶2. (S/NF) The CG commented that he spent all day on January 26 in meetings with the sheiks of the largest tribes in Basrah to brief them on the recent arrest operations of MND-SE. According to the CG, the tribal sheiks were willing to listen to the reasons for the arrests, but did not say anything beyond a desire to have the arrestees turned over to the Iraqi judicial system. These leaders mentioned that the issue was one of Iraqi sovereignty and British interference. However, the CG added that some individuals after the meetings did privately say they agreed with the arrests despite the best efforts of the Governor to portray those arrested as Iraqi police officers in the front line of the war against terrorism. (Note - the Governor had called for demonstrations on January 26, but had a poor turnout. As a result, he is now trying again to muster a crowd for January 28.)

¶3. (S/NF) With regards to the 14 individuals initially arrested, six have already been released. According to the CG, of the eight still in custody, one had been wanted for murder by the Iraqi police. In addition, two others are willingly implicating the Governor in a number of crimes they committed. Those latter two, Iraqi Police Service (IPS) members, Major Jassim Hassan and Captain Abbas Munis Abdulaal, have been forthcoming in their respective confessions because they do not want to be turned over to the Iraqi judicial system where they are convinced they will eventually find themselves murdered.

¶4. (S/NF) The CG believed that the outcry against the arrests will eventually blow over and the Governor will find something else to vent about. The CG pointed to the anti-central government rhetoric of the Governor regarding the fuel subsidies in December 2005 and his previous anti-Coalition rhetoric in September 2005 when he pushed through a boycott because of other arrests by British forces. The CG pointed out that there are no Provincial Council members that will publicly side with the British against the Governor although most, he believe, probably

agree and even applaud the arrests. The CG expects the Governor to stay where he is until the provincial elections.

¶5. (S/NF) The Provincial Council (PC) members have reached out to the REO to "mediate" between the British and themselves. However, the CG pointed out that the brief boycott is over and his door is open for dialogue. The CG also stated that he has been the only one reaching out to individuals and that no one has approached him. He asked that the DRC stress to the PC members to engage directly with him. The DRC did receive a phone call on January 27 from the Chairman of the PC following up on the letter asking for mediation. The DRC will meet with PC members in the next two days and report septel.

¶6. (S/NF) Comment: The Governor is clearly feeling anxious over the British arrests of individuals who can link him to various crimes. As a result, he has attempted to whip up anti-British feeling among the general populace and the Provincial Council (PC.) However, he is unpopular with the general public because he has failed to deliver necessary public services and is disliked by most PC members because of his links to criminal activities. The British appear to have gathered enough evidence from their arrestees to even arrest the Governor. How the Governor now reacts or doesn't react in the next several days will determine whether he will stay where he is until the provincial elections. End Comment.

MARRANO